

OUR VIEW

‘Haves,’ ‘have-nots’ in budgets

On occasion, we are reminded that the budget process used by the Oregon Legislature and state agencies is a bit curious.

According to the Oregon Blue Book, the state’s revenue budget for the current biennium is \$85.8 billion. Of that, 26.1% is the general fund, which comes mainly from the state corporate and personal income taxes, the cigarette tax and the estate tax.

About 44% of the state’s revenue comes from money state agencies take in as fines and fees in return for services. Some of that money is dedicated under law or constitutional amendment to specific agencies or purposes.

About 1.5% of the revenue comes from the state lottery.

Instead of having all of the state’s revenue from taxes, fees and the lottery flow into the general fund, much of it flows into cubbyholes within various state agencies instead.

As a result, when legislators write the budget they are debating the highest and best use of their lunch money. Most of the rest of the state budget is already spoken for.

This results in haves and have-nots among state agencies and a sort of legislative panhandling exercise as agency heads try to make ends meet.

An example: Oregon Water Resources Department administrator, Tom Byler, recently paid a visit to a legislative committee asking permission to raise fees for water transactions and dam inspections by 17% just to keep those divisions functioning. Even with the increase, several people will be laid off.

The implication is the Legislature doesn’t have the money for OWRD and some other “have-not” agencies to do their job. The reality is the money is tucked away elsewhere.

The Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation is an example of a “have” agency. Under a couple of constitutional amendments, 7.5% of state lottery proceeds are earmarked for the department. In the current biennial budget, that’s \$107.3 million — more than twice the OWRD’s entire budget. Much of the rest of the Parks and Recreation budget, \$98.7 million, comes from user fees, and stays within the department.

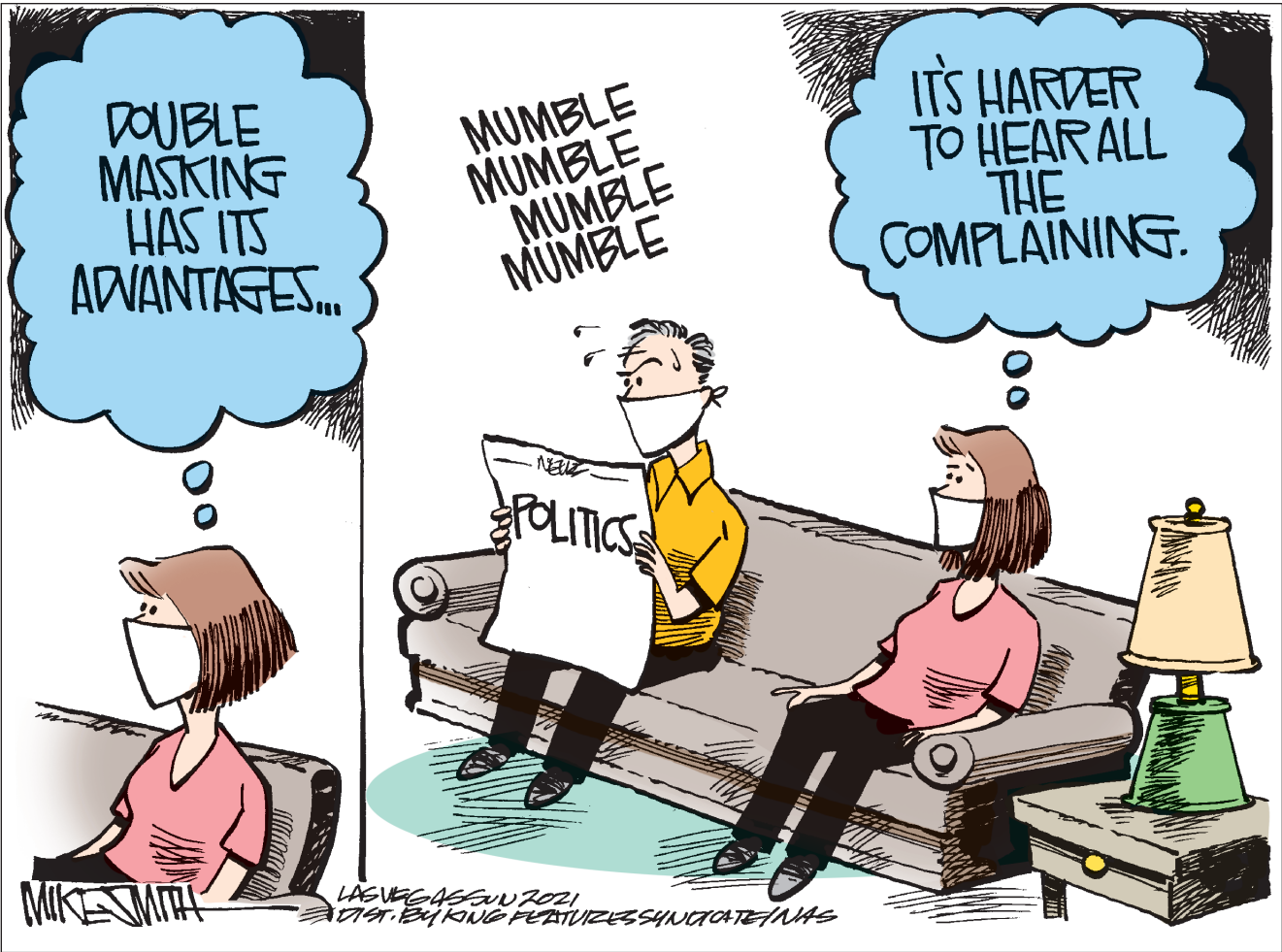
Assuming that transferring water rights and inspecting dams in a timely manner are important, it should be up to legislators to assure the agency is adequately funded. That is not currently the case, because of the cubbyholes.

We cannot tell legislators how to put together a state budget, but we do know that the current system leaves some “have-not” agencies dependent on squeezing every penny out of farmers and ranchers and others who need water, inspections or other state-mandated services.

At the same time, the “have” agencies, such as Parks and Recreation, have more than enough money to carry out their missions of managing state parks and campgrounds.

The time is long overdue to discuss this shortcoming that leaves some agencies chronically underfunded and others overfunded.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.



Your views

Mayor made right decision on golf board member

First, I would like to thank Mayor Kerry McQuisten and City Manager Jon Cannon for their effort so far in recognizing past errors made by previous council members in the city charter and correcting them, without which there would be a less effective guide upon which to base their decisions and actions, and the citizens of Baker would receive less consideration and attention.

Second, I support Mayor McQuisten’s opposition to appointing Fred Warner Jr., former city manager and Golf Board member, to a position on that board, during a discussion on the topic at the last City Council meeting, held Tuesday, Feb. 9. Appointing an applicant to a city board who is incompatible with working with the new mayor, city manager, and council members would be a bad management decision, and not in the best interest of the community.

Third, I would like to thank the com-

munity members who participated in a discussion of Shannon and Whitney Black’s “Common Sense Sanctuary” proposal during the last City Council meeting. It is a clear statement on the devastating effects that endless, arbitrary, one-size-fits-all state coronavirus mask and other mandates and governmental overreach and abuse have had, and continue to have, on community businesses and lives in general.

Todd Arriola
Baker City

Green movement’s stubbornness

By Chris Reed

Apocalyptic warnings about climate change — such as the U.S. Geological Survey-Cornell-University of Arizona report in 2014 that the American Southwest faced a significant risk of a 35-year “megadrought” — grow more plausible and terrifying each year as new global temperature records are set and massive wildfires come to seem normal.

Some scientists believe the planet may already be past the tipping point. “The Uninhabitable Earth: A Story of the Future,” a 2019 book by American journalist David Wallace-Wells, laid out the view that there is already so much carbon in the atmosphere that global disaster is inevitable. But Wallace-Wells also wrote that thanks to technological advances, “the solutions are obvious, and available” — referring to not just increasingly cheap green energy but to proposals to use “geoengineering.” For the uninitiated, geoengineering is the deliberate, large-scale intervention in the Earth’s climate system to slow or reverse climate change.

Unfortunately, a new controversy in Sweden shows once again the maddening nature of modern environmentalism. The same green groups that warn that climate change will worsen or ruin the lives of billions of people are opposed to using advanced technology to reduce the effects of greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, they insist the main solutions must be 1) a planetary abandonment of dirty fuels — even if that is effectively impossible because the world’s two most populous nations, China and India, embrace coal-burning power plants as essential to future economic growth — and 2) dramatic changes in how humans lead lives and consume natural resources.

The dispute in Sweden involves the proposal by a team of Harvard

scientists to launch a scientific balloon in June from Kiruna, Sweden’s northernmost town, to try to replicate the temperature-depressing effects seen from major volcanic eruptions. It is a matter of record that the mass emission of sulfur dioxide caused by the Philippines’ Mount Pinatubo blast in 1991 lowered thermostats around the world. Many scientists have long contended that this sort of geoengineering is both less risky and much cheaper than other proposals.

Yet The Guardian reported last week that environmental groups including Greenpeace Sweden, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and Friends of the Earth Sweden have asked the Swedish government to block the tests to prevent the possible emergence of a “dangerous, unpredictable and unmanageable” technology.

Frank Keutsch, leader of the Harvard team, told the London newspaper, “The risk of not doing research on this outweighs the risk of doing this research. ... Climate change is a problem of profound size and potentially profound impact on humanity. I think we should be considering all kinds of options because it’s unlikely that there is going to be a silver bullet that will fix everything.”

If you believe climate change is a profound threat to humanity, Keutsch’s argument should strike you as cogent and powerful. The atmospheric science professor offered to personally meet with concerned Swedish environmentalists to explain the importance of research on solar radiation management.

But it probably would be a waste of his time. Many green groups’ opposition to promising geoengineering technologies is not rooted in logic or science. It is rooted in a quasi-spiritual, righteous belief that humankind must

pay a price for despoiling the world. As longtime journalist Joel Garreau wrote in 2010, “Environmentalism is progressively taking the social form of a religion and fulfilling some of the individual needs associated with religion, with major political and policy implications.”

Yet if environmentalism as a religion opposes attempts to save the planet because they don’t include enough suffering from humans, then it mutates into something different: a virtue-signaling death cult.

Yes, of course humanity should continue with its push for cleaner, more sustainable sources of energy.

Yes, of course people should think globally and then act locally to reduce their carbon footprints.

And, yes, it would seem like the opposite of karma if the humans who had fouled the Earth so badly over the past 200 years used new technology to avoid paying much of a price for their wanton behavior.

But wait a minute. As the debate has built in recent weeks over who should be vaccinated first for the pandemic, the argument that the goal should be to save the lives of as many people as possible has gained power — because it is obvious. So the most at-risk group, the elderly, now is the focus of vaccination campaigns.

When will it become obvious that the goal of efforts to address global warming should be to help as many people as possible? That an all-of-the-above response to this threat is necessary to limit coming human misery?

This is already obvious to some of us — those not in the thrall of gang green.

Chris Reed is the deputy editorial and opinion editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune. Twitter: @calwhine. Email: chris.reed@suniontribune.com.

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn

Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council

Chambers. Councilors Lynette Perry, Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ray Duman, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.